

30 years, Congress has dramatically expanded both the tax base and the tax rate supporting the Medicare trust fund. Initially, Medicare relief on a 0.6-percent payroll tax on the first \$6,600 earned. Today, the program relies on nearly a 3-percent payroll tax on all income earned. Next year for the first time in its history, the trust fund will begin spending more money than it is taking in. Without reform, a tax increase is around the corner. And at best, this tax increase would only prolong the program a few years.

Third, beneficiaries pay for Medicare's failures. Skyrocketing costs of the program force the same rate of growth on the direct expenditures by our seniors and disabled. Their out-of-pocket costs are directly related to overall program costs. Medicare does provide a generous subsidy, making it a better deal than anything else out there. But not all services are covered, the coinsurance and deductibles are substantial, and premiums are calculated to cover a defined amount of program costs. Only 1 out of 10 or 11 percent of seniors rely solely on Medicare for their health care insurance. Most seniors still purchase private supplemental medical coverage or have access to additional employer-sponsored coverage. Beneficiary costs will continue to climb as the overall program spending spins out of control.

Medicare is an entitlement. I do not suggest we take away that concept. However, I do ask us to remember what it entitles us to. Quite simply, the entitlement was intended to provide access to the private system. Our predecessors did not create a system which limited beneficiaries to public hospitals or Government-employed physicians. Rather, it provided financial access to private physicians and hospitals, the same providers Americans used before they turned 65.

If we viewed the Medicare subsidy today as it was originally intended—allowing beneficiaries to use it to access private coverage—seniors would then be able to choose health care plans that better meet their needs. Today they do not have that choice. We should provide that choice to our seniors.

Mr. President, I will continue this discussion over the next several days as we look forward to better ways to save, to preserve our Medicare Program.

I yield the floor.

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to speak for 15 minutes, and that a period for morning business be extended accordingly.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? Without objection, it is so ordered.

LETTER FROM THE NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, earlier today my colleague from Arkansas, Senator PRYOR, spoke about a very disturbing letter circulated by the National Rifle Association [NRA]. I commend him for his remarks. I do not want to get into a lengthy discussion of this issue, but I urge all of my colleagues, regardless of where you stand on the issue of gun control, to read this letter, which was sent out by the NRA under the signature of Mr. Wayne LaPierre, the executive vice president.

I do not know of anyone here, no matter how strongly they feel about the legitimate issue of what we do about gun control, that would not be offended by this letter and the language in it.

Again, I am not going to spend a great deal of time here this morning, but there is language in the letter which talks about:

... jack-booted government thugs [given] more power to take away our Constitutional rights, break in our doors, seize our guns, destroy our property, and even injure or kill us;

That is how the letter refers to our Government and the hard-working members of our Federal law-enforcement agencies. And the letter goes on, in reference to the Clinton administration:

... if you have a badge, you have the Government's go ahead to harass, intimidate, even murder law-abiding citizens;

And there is even more:

Waco and the Branch Davidians ... Not too long ago it was unthinkable for Federal agents wearing Nazi bucket helmets and black storm trooper uniforms to attack law-abiding citizens.

Law-abiding citizens? People who shot Federal agents, who burned their own buildings, and killed their own families and friends? I mean this is incredible.

And this is not a letter from some fringe organization. It is a letter from the NRA—a national organization that usually has credibility. Quite simply, the NRA ought to know better.

Please read this letter. It is five or six pages. And if you are not as offended as I have been by reading it, I will be surprised.

Someone needs to ask for a retraction of this letter. Put aside the tragic events in Oklahoma for a moment, I do not want to suggest that this letter is linked to that terrible tragedy. I do not want to cloud the issue. But someone needs to apologize for this letter. It goes way beyond the kind of rhetoric that is appropriate on these issues.

Remember this letter went, apparently, to millions of homes. I have no problem with people sending out fundraising letters and even using strong language in those solicitations. But the NRA's letter goes way beyond the pale. At first, I was so shocked, I thought it might be a hoax. But apparently it was not. I understand the NRA has confirmed that it sent the letter.

Again, I urge my colleagues to read the letter and I ask unanimous consent that this letter be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the letter was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION.

DEAR FELLOW AMERICANS: I've worn out a lot of shoe leather walking the halls of Congress. I've met key leaders, I've talked with old allies, I've met with the new Congressmen and many staff members.

What I'm hearing and seeing concerns me.

Many of our new Congressmen are ignoring America's 80 million gun owners. Some have forgotten what we did to elect them. Others say our demands to restore our Constitutional freedoms are "politically out of line."

Don't get me wrong, not all of them are like this. Senator Phil Gramm, House Speaker Newt Gingrich, and Congressmen Bill McCollum, Bill Brewster and Harold Volkmer are all coming to our aid. But too many others are not.

And without a major show of force by America's 80 million gun owners, America will resume its long march down the road to gun bans, destruction of the Constitution and loss of every sacred freedom.

I want you to know I'm not looking for a fight.

But when you consider the facts of our current situation, you too, will see we have no other choice.

Fact No. 1: The Congress' leading anti-gunners, Senators Dianne Feinstein, Ted Kennedy and Congressmen Charles Schumer and Major Owens all survived their last elections.

They've pledged to fight us to the bitter end for Brady II and its ammo taxes, licensing and registration schemes, gun rationing, bureaucrats with the power to determine if you "need" a gun and yes, the repeal of the Second Amendment.

It doesn't matter to them that the Brady Law is a failure.

It doesn't matter to them that the Brady Law has become one more tool that government agents are using to deny the Constitutional rights of law abiding citizens.

It doesn't matter to them that the semi-auto ban gives jack-booted government thugs more power to take away our Constitutional rights, break in our doors, seize our guns, destroy our property, and even injure or kill us.

Schumer, Feinstein, Kennedy, Owens and the rest of the anti-gunners want more and more gun control.

It can be something small and subtle like a regulation expanding the disqualification criteria for the Brady Law. They're fighting for anything that makes it harder for you to own a gun.

The gun banners simply don't like you. They don't trust you. They don't want you to own a gun. And they'll stop at nothing until they've forced you to turn over your guns to the government.

Fact No. 2: If the anti-gunners fail to achieve their goals in Congress, they have a fall-back position in Bill Clinton, the most anti-gun President in American history.

In two short years, Bill Clinton launched two successful attacks on the Constitution. He signed two gun control bills into law. He has sworn to veto any repeal of the semi-auto ban and any restoration of our Constitutional rights.

His Interior and Agriculture Departments have set their sights on closing hunting lands.

And his Environmental Protection Agency is attempting to take jurisdiction over existing uses of lead. This, of course, includes gun ranges and spent shot.

What's more, gun owners aren't the only ones Clinton's EPA has set its sights on.